

A Letter concerning Toleration

My distinguished friend,

You ask me for my opinion of mutual toleration among Christians. I reply in a word that it seems to me to be the principal mark of the true church. Antiquity of titles and places of worship which some people boast of, the reformation of doctrine that others stress, the orthodoxy of one's faith that everyone claims (for everyone is orthodox in their own eyes) – these things are likely to be signs of competition for power and dominion rather than marks of Christ's church. A person may have all of them and still not be a Christian, if he lacks charity, gentleness, and goodwill toward all human beings and toward those who profess the Christian faith in particular.

'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them,' says our Saviour to his disciples, 'but ye shall not be so' (Luke 22: [25], 26). True religion has a different object. It did not come into the world in order to establish outward pomp and ecclesiastical domination and violence, but to ground a life of goodness and piety. Anyone who wishes to enlist in Christ's church must, more than anything else, declare war on his own vices, on his own pride and lust. Without holiness of life, purity of morals, goodness of heart, and gentleness, any aspiration to the name of Christian is unjustified.

'When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren', said Our Lord to Peter (Luke 22: 32). For one will hardly persuade other people that he is truly concerned for their salvation if he neglects his own. No one can sincerely strive with all his strength to make other people Christians if he has not yet truly embraced the religion of Christ in his own mind. For if we are to believe the Gospel and the Apostles, no one can be a

Christian without charity and without the faith that works by love¹ and not by violence.

Do those who beat and torture people on the pretext of religion, and rob them of their property and put them to death, do all this in a spirit of friendship and goodwill? I appeal to their conscience. I shall believe it myself when I see these fanatics inflicting the same chastisement on those of their friends and associates who openly sin against the precepts of the Gospel, and when I see them attacking with fire and sword those of their own partisans who are stained and corrupted by vice and who will certainly perish if they do not reform and bear better fruit, and when I see them expressing their love and longing for the salvation of *their* souls with every form of cruelty and torture. For if, as they claim, their only motive in seizing people's goods, mutilating their bodies, ruining their health in filthy prisons, and taking their lives, is charity and zeal for their souls, in order to ensure their faith and salvation, why do they allow their own followers to indulge, freely and with impunity, in fornication, fraud, malice, and all the other vices, which, as the Apostle declares (*Romans 1: 28–32*), are blatantly pagan? Such actions as these are more contrary to the glory of God, the purity of the church, and the salvation of souls than any mistaken conviction of conscience that falls foul of ecclesiastical decrees, or any failings in outward worship if they are combined with innocence of life. Why, I ask, does their zeal for God, the church, and the salvation of souls – which burns so fiercely it even burns people alive – why does it ignore, and not correct or punish, the vices and moral faults which everyone agrees are diametrically opposed to the profession of Christianity? Why does it insist on penalizing beliefs which are often too subtle for most people to understand or on imposing fine points of ritual? Why is this its driving ambition?

It will only finally become clear which of the parties to the conflict, the triumphant party or the vanquished party, has the sounder view on these matters, and which one is guilty of schism or heresy, when final judgement is given on the cause of their separation.² For no one is a heretic who follows Christ, and embraces his teaching and puts on his yoke, even if he does leave his mother and father and the usual ceremonies

¹ Galatians 5: 6: 'faith which worketh by love'.

² The Last Judgement. On 'separation' see 'Postscript: heresy and schism'.

and religious practices of his family and country and any other persons whatever.³

If sectarian divisions are so inimical to the salvation of souls, ‘adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry’ and so on are no less ‘works of the flesh’, on which the Apostle pronounces an explicit sentence that ‘they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God’ (Galatians 5: [19]–21). Anyone who is sincerely concerned for the kingdom of God and seriously committed to working for its extension, needs to put as much care and effort into eliminating these vices as into eliminating sects. If he acts otherwise, if he is ruthless and implacable against people of different beliefs, but indulgent toward sins and immoralities unworthy of the name of Christian, he plainly shows that for all his talk about the church, it is some kingdom other than God’s that he is building.

I marvel, as others also surely do, that anyone could accept that a person whose soul he ardently desires to save should die of torture in an unconverted state, but I simply cannot conceive that anyone would ever believe that such behaviour could be motivated by love, benevolence, or charity. If people are to be compelled by fire and sword to accept certain doctrines, or if they are forcibly driven to adopt some form of external worship without any concern for their morals, and if anyone converts heterodox persons to the faith in the sense of compelling them to profess what they do not believe, while permitting them to do what the Gospel forbids to Christians and the believer forbids to himself, I do not doubt that he wants a great many people to profess the same beliefs as himself, but who can believe that what he wants is a Christian church? No wonder, then, if such people use weapons inappropriate to the service of Christ, since, whatever their pretensions, they are not fighting for true religion and the Christian church. If they sincerely desired the salvation of souls, as he did who is the Captain of our salvation, they would walk in his footsteps and follow the excellent example of the Prince of Peace. He sent out his troops to subdue the nations and compel them to come into the church not with swords or spears or any other weapon of violence, but with the Gospel, with the message of peace and with the exemplary force of holiness.⁴ If force of arms were the right way to convert unbelievers, if

³ Cf. Matthew 11: 29–30; Luke 14: 26.

⁴ Jesus sending out his disciples: Matthew 10: 1ff.; Mark 6: 6–13; Luke 9: 1–6. For ‘compel’, cf. Luke 14: 23.

armed soldiers were the best means of recalling blind or stubborn people from their errors, he had at hand a whole army of heavenly legions, in comparison with which the troops available to even the most powerful protector of the church are a mere squadron.

Distinction of church and commonwealth fundamental⁵

Toleration of those who have different views on religious questions is so consistent with the Gospel and with reason that it seems incredible that people should be blind in so plain a matter. I do not want to blame either the arrogance and ambition of the one party or the bigotry and fanaticism of the other that knows nothing of charity and gentleness. These are vices that will probably never be eliminated from human affairs, though they are such that no one wants to be openly accused of them himself; anyone who has been led by them to act badly almost invariably seeks to preserve his reputation by giving them an honourable disguise. But I would not want anyone to use a concern for their country and obedience to its laws as a pretext for persecution and unchristian cruelty; I would not want anyone to seek moral licence and impunity for their crimes under the name of religion; I would not want anyone to deceive themselves or others that they are faithful subjects of the prince or sincere worshippers of God.

In order to avoid these things, I believe that we must above all distinguish between political and religious matters, and properly define the boundary between church and commonwealth.⁶ Until this is done, no limit can be put to the disputes between those who have, or affect to have, a zeal for the salvation of souls and those who have a real or affected concern for the safety of the commonwealth.

What is a commonwealth?

A commonwealth appears to me to be an association of people constituted solely for the purpose of preserving and promoting civil goods.

⁵ The section headings within the text are supplied by the translator.

⁶ The equivalent of *res publica* in Locke's English *Letters* is normally 'commonwealth', but sometimes 'state'. In this translation, for the sake of consistency with the other *Letters*, we have normally used the word 'commonwealth'.

By ‘civil goods’ I mean life, liberty, physical integrity, and freedom from pain, as well as external possessions, such as land, money, the necessities of everyday life, and so on.

It is the duty of the civil ruler⁷ to guarantee and preserve the just possession of these things which relate to this life, for the people as a whole and for private subjects individually, by means of laws made equally for all. If anyone has a mind to violate the laws, contrary to right and justice, his reckless impulse has to be checked by fear of punishment. Punishment consists in the confiscation in whole or in part of those good things which he could and should otherwise have enjoyed. Since no one voluntarily gives up any of his goods, let alone his liberty or his life, the ruler is armed with force to inflict punishment on those who violate the rights of others, and this force consists in the united strength of his subjects.

The whole jurisdiction of rulers is concerned solely with these civil goods. All the right and authority of the civil power is confined and restricted to the protection and promotion of these civil goods and these alone. It should not, and cannot, be extended to the salvation of souls. I believe the following arguments demonstrate these points.

First, the civil ruler has no more mandate than others have for the care of souls. He has no mandate from God, for it nowhere appears that God has granted men authority over other men, to compel them to adopt their own religion. And no such power can be given to a ruler by men; for no one can abdicate responsibility for his own eternal salvation by adopting under compulsion a form of belief or worship prescribed to him by another person, whether prince or subject. For no one can believe at another’s behest, however much they try to do so; and the force and effectiveness of true and saving religion lies in belief. No matter what you profess with your lips or what external worship you offer, if you are not inwardly and profoundly convinced in your own heart that it is both true and pleasing to God, it not only does not assist your salvation, it positively hinders it. For in addition to the other sins which your religion must expiate, you are adding a pretence of religion itself and a contempt of the Deity, for you are offering the great and good God a form of worship which you believe is displeasing to him.

⁷ In the other *Letters* Locke normally uses ‘magistrate’ as the English equivalent to *magistratus*, but he also occasionally uses ‘ruler’. We have preferred normally to translate this word as ‘ruler’.

Secondly, care of souls cannot belong to the civil ruler, because his power consists wholly in compulsion. But true and saving religion consists in an inward conviction of the mind; without it, nothing has value in the eyes of God. Such is the nature of the human understanding that it cannot be compelled by any external force. You may take away people's goods, imprison them, even inflict physical torture on their bodies, but you will not achieve anything if what you are trying to do by this punishment is change the judgement of their minds about things.

But you will say:⁸ a ruler can make use of arguments to bring heterodox persons to the truth and assure their salvation. True, but he shares this approach with others. In teaching, instructing, and using arguments to recall a person who has gone astray, he is certainly doing what a good man should; a ruler is not required to cease to be either a man or a Christian. However, it is one thing to persuade, another to command, one thing to use arguments in a dispute, another to issue decrees. The latter belong to the civil power, the former to human goodwill. It is open to anyone to advise, exhort, convict of error, and bring a person to their way of thinking by rational argument; but to command by edicts, to compel by the sword are exclusively the tools of the ruler. This then I say: the civil power should not use the civil law to prescribe articles of faith (or doctrines) or the manner in which one should worship God. For laws have no force if no penalties are attached; and if penalties are prescribed, they are completely inappropriate and unsuited to persuasion.

To accept a doctrine or a form of worship for the salvation of one's soul, one must believe sincerely that the doctrine is true, and that the form of worship will be acceptable and pleasing to God, but no penalty has any force to instil this kind of conviction in the mind. It is light that is needed to change a belief in the mind; punishment of the body does not lend light.

Thirdly, salvation of souls cannot be any business of the civil ruler. For even granted that the authority of laws and the force of penalties *were* effective in changing people's minds, yet this would have no effect on the salvation of their souls. For since there is only one true religion, one way which leads to the heavenly home, what hope would there be for the majority of mortals to get there, if they were obliged as a condition to

⁸ Throughout the *First Letter* Locke makes use of the literary form of an academic *disputatio*, in which possible objections to Locke's thesis are attributed to an imaginary opponent.

discard the dictates of their reason and conscience and blindly accept the doctrines of their prince and worship God as the laws of their country required? Given the great variety of religious beliefs held by princes, it would follow that the narrow way and the strait gate that leads to heaven would be open only to a very few people who would all be living in one particular place; and the most absurd consequence, totally unworthy of God, would follow, that eternal happiness or torment would depend solely on the accident of birth.⁹

Many other arguments could be made on this question, but these seem to warrant the conclusion that the power of the commonwealth is concerned only with civil goods and is restricted to the things of this world and does not extend in any way to those things that look to the future life.

What is a church?

Now let us see what a church¹⁰ is. A church appears to me to be a free association of people coming together of their own accord to offer public worship to God in a manner which they believe will be acceptable to the Deity for the salvation of their souls.

It is, I stress, a free and voluntary association. No one is born a member of any church; otherwise the religion of one's father and forefathers would pass down by hereditary right along with their estates, and one would owe one's faith to one's birth. Nothing more absurd can be imagined. The truth is that no one is bound by nature to any church or tied to any sect. Of his own accord he joins the association in which he believes he has found true religion and a form of worship pleasing to God. The hope of salvation that he sees there is both the sole cause of his entering the church and the sole reason why he remains. And if he finds anything wrong with its doctrine or unseemly in its ritual, he must have the same liberty to leave as he had to enter; no bonds can be indissoluble but those attached to the certain expectation of eternal life. It is from members so united, of their own accord and for this purpose, that a church is formed.

⁹ Cf. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J.B. Bury (London, 1909): 'Even the imperceptible sect of the Rogatians could affirm, without a blush, that when Christ should descend to judge the earth, he would find his true religion preserved only in a few nameless villages of the Caesarean Mauritania' (ch. 21, vol. II, p. 355).

¹⁰ *ecclesia*.

It follows that we should ask what the power of a church is, and to what laws is it subject.

No association, however free, however insignificant its purpose and activities, can survive without the risk of speedy dissolution if it is completely without laws. This applies equally to an association of learned persons to pursue philosophy, of businessmen for commerce, or even of men of leisure seeking conversation and entertainment. Therefore a church too must have its laws. A schedule must be made of the time and place at which meetings will take place; conditions have to be published for admission to the association and exclusion from it; the various duties and the order of business have to be determined, and so on. But since people have come together to form this association of their own accord (as I have demonstrated), free of all compulsion, it necessarily follows that the right of making laws lies solely with the association, or at least – and this comes to the same thing – with those whom the association itself has approved by its own consent.

But you will say: it cannot be the true church if it does not have a bishop or presbytery endowed with an authority to govern that descends all the way from the Apostles themselves in continuous and uninterrupted succession.

First, I ask you to point to the edict in which Christ laid down this law for his church. And in a matter of such importance, it will not be asking too much to require an explicit statement. The saying ‘where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matthew 18: 20) appears to suggest otherwise. You can see for yourself whether a gathering which has Christ in its midst can fail to be a true church. Certainly, nothing essential to true salvation can be missing there, and that is enough for our purpose.

Secondly, I beg you to notice that those who claim that the governors of the church were instituted by Christ and must follow in unbroken succession disagree with each other right from the start. Their disagreement necessarily permits freedom of choice, with the consequence that everyone is at liberty to join whichever church they prefer.

Thirdly, you may have the governor you set over yourself, the one you believe to be inescapably designated in such a long succession, while I likewise commit myself to the association where I am convinced I will find what I need for the salvation of my soul. And thus ecclesiastical freedom (which you demand) is preserved for both of us, and neither has a legislator which he did not choose for himself.

But since you are so anxious about the true church, permit me, in passing, to ask this question: is it not more fitting for Christ's church to establish conditions for communion¹¹ which contain those things that the Holy Spirit has taught in clear and explicit words in Holy Scripture and those things alone, rather than to impose its own inventions or interpretations as divine law, and give them authority as absolutely essential to the profession of Christianity, though they are matters on which the divine oracles¹² have not pronounced, or at any rate not as a matter of law? Anyone who requires for communion in the church what Christ does not require for eternal life is perhaps cleverly contriving an association that suits his own views and his own interest, but how are we to call a church Christ's church if it is founded upon laws not his and excludes persons whom he will one day receive into the kingdom of heaven?

However, this is not the place to explore the marks of the true church. I would just like to give a word of warning to those who fight so fiercely for the doctrines of their own association and are always holding forth about the church and nothing else, making as much of a din as the silversmiths made long ago in Ephesus about their goddess Diana (Acts 19: 23–41) and perhaps from the same motive. I would remind them that the Gospel everywhere testifies that the true disciples of Christ must expect persecution and bear it, but I do not remember reading anywhere in the New Testament that the true church of Christ should persecute others or harass them, or compel them to adopt their own doctrines with violence, fire, and sword.

The purpose of a religious association, as I have said, is public worship of God and the attainment of eternal life by means of it. This is what the whole of the church's teaching should aim at; these are the only ends to which all of its laws should be directed. There is and can be no concern in this association with the possession of civil or earthly goods. No force is to be used here for any reason. All force belongs to the civil ruler; and the possession and use of external goods are subject to his power.

You will say: what sanctions will maintain the laws of a church in the absence of all coercion? I reply: the kind of sanction that is appropriate where outward profession and outward observance bring no benefit if they do not sink deep into the soul and there receive the full assent

¹¹ *communio* also has the sense of 'participation'.

¹² A periphrasis for the Holy Scriptures.

of conscience. And therefore the weapons of this association are exhortation, warning, and advice, and these are the means to keep its members to their duty. If these means fail to correct delinquents and put wanderers back on the right road, there is only one recourse, and that is to cut off from the association those who are rebellious and obstinate and give no hope of amendment, and throw them out. This is the supreme and ultimate sanction of ecclesiastical power, and its sole penalty is that, as the relation between the body and an amputated member ceases, so the convicted person ceases to be a part of that church.

Duties of mutual toleration

(i) Duties of individuals with regard to mutual toleration

On these premises, let us next ask what the duties of individual persons are with regard to toleration.

First, I say that a church is not obliged in the name of toleration to continue, after due warning, to keep in its midst anyone who persists in offending against the laws of the association. An association has no future, if there is no consequence to breaking its laws, since they are the conditions of participation in the association and its only bond. However, it must be careful not to embellish the decree of excommunication with verbal abuse or physical violence that would in any way harm the person or property of the ejected member. For as I have said, the use of force is restricted to rulers; private persons do not have the right to use force except in self-defence. Excommunication does not, and cannot, deprive the excommunicated person of any of the civil goods that he previously possessed; they belong to his civil status and are subject to the ruler's protection. The effect of excommunication is simply to dissolve the bond between the body and one of its members, once the association has declared its decision. When this relation ceases, participation in certain things which the association offers its members also ceases, necessarily, and no one has a civil right to them. An excommunicated person has suffered no civil wrong if the minister of a church, while celebrating the Lord's Supper, refuses to give him bread and wine which were not paid for with his own money but with someone else's.

Secondly, no private person has the right to attack or diminish another person's civil goods in any way because he professes a religion or ritual

differing from his own; all of that person's human rights as well as his civil rights are to be scrupulously observed. They are not a matter of religion; whether he is a Christian or a pagan, all force and injury should be avoided. The standard of justice is to be supplemented by the duties of benevolence and charity. This is commanded by the Gospel, and recommended by reason and the common society of human beings with each other formed by nature. If anyone strays from the straight path, that is their problem, they are the losers by it; it does no harm to you. Just because you believe someone will perish in the life to come, that is no reason for you to mistreat them now and deprive them of the good things of this life.

(ii) Duties of churches with regard to mutual toleration

What I have said about mutual toleration between private individuals who disagree with each other about religion, I would also apply to individual churches. In some ways they are private persons with regard to each other, and no one of them has jurisdiction over any other, not even if it so happens that the civil ruler belongs to one church rather than to another. For a commonwealth cannot grant any new right to a church, any more than vice versa a church can grant a new right to a commonwealth. A church remains what it always was, whether the ruler joins it or leaves it, a free and voluntary association. If the ruler joins it, it does not acquire the power of the sword; and if he leaves, it does not lose the discipline which it formerly had to teach and to excommunicate. It will always be the unalterable right of an association of people who have come together of their own accord,¹³ to expel any of its own members it thinks fit, but it acquires no jurisdiction over outsiders, no matter who joins. This is the reason why different churches should, without discrimination, constantly maintain peace, friendship, and an even temper towards each other, as private persons do, without any one of them claiming superior rights.

To make things clear by an example, let us imagine two churches at Constantinople, one of Remonstrants, the other of Antiremonstrants.¹⁴

¹³ Locke here uses the phrase 'spontanea societas'. Normally he uses the phrase 'societas voluntaria' or 'societas libera et voluntaria'.

¹⁴ Within the Calvinist church in the United Provinces, when Locke lived there, these two groups were sharply divided on a range of doctrines, especially about predestination.

Would anyone say that either church has the right to take away the liberty or property of those who disagree with them (as we see happens elsewhere), or to punish them with exile or death because they have different doctrines or rituals? The Turks meanwhile say nothing and laugh up their sleeves at the cruelty of Christians beating and killing each other. If, however, one of these churches does have authority to savage the other, which one is it, I ask, and by what right? The reply will undoubtedly be: the orthodox church has this right against the erroneous or heretical church. This is to use big, plausible words to say nothing. Every church is orthodox in its own eyes, and in the eyes of others it is erroneous or heretical, since it believes its own beliefs to be true and condemns other beliefs as wrong. For this reason the conflict between them about the truth of their doctrines and the correctness of their ritual is undecidable. No judicial sentence can settle it, for there is no judge of such things either at Constantinople or anywhere else on this earth. The verdict on this question rests solely with the supreme judge of all men, and he alone will correct the party in error. Meanwhile both parties should reflect how much more wrong they do in adding injustice to the sin of pride, if not of error, when they boldly and brazenly assault the servants of another master who are not answerable to them.

Even if it *could* be finally determined which of the conflicting parties held the correct views on religion, this would not authorize the orthodox church to plunder other churches, for churches have no jurisdiction in worldly matters, and fire and sword are not suitable instruments for disproving errors and forming or changing people's minds. Suppose, however, that the civil ruler supports one or other of the two parties, and is willing to put his sword in their hands, so that they may chastise the heterodox party in any way they wish, with his approval. Would anyone say that a Christian church could derive any right over its brethren from the Sultan of Turkey? An infidel cannot on his own authority punish Christians in matters of faith, and therefore he cannot in any way impart that authority to any Christian association; he cannot give a right which he does not have. Now apply this argument to a Christian kingdom. Civil power is the same everywhere, and it can bestow no more authority on a church if it is in the hands of a Christian prince than it can in the hands of a pagan prince; that is, it can bestow no authority at all.

But it is perhaps worth remarking that these bold partisans of truth, these warriors against error who will not tolerate schisms, rarely express

that zeal for God which totally consumes them like a burning fire, unless they have the support of the civil ruler. As soon as they have his ear and the preponderance of power that goes with it, goodbye to peace and Christian charity; mutual tolerance is for other situations. When they are inferior in political strength, they can patiently and harmlessly tolerate around them the contagion of that idolatry, superstition, and heresy which at other times they fear will do so much harm to them and their religion. Nor do they willingly put any effort into refuting the errors in fashion with the court and the sovereign. Yet this is the only real way to spread the truth, to combine the weight of reason and argument with humanity and goodwill.

Neither persons, then, nor churches, nor even commonwealths can have any right to attack each other's civil goods and steal each other's worldly assets on the pretext of religion. I beg anyone who thinks otherwise to reflect what unlimited opportunities for conflicts and wars they are giving mankind, what an invitation to plunder and kill and nourish grievances for ever. It is impossible to build and maintain peace and security, let alone friendship, among men where there is a prevailing belief that dominion is founded in grace and that religion should be spread by force of arms.

(iii) Duties of clergymen with regard to mutual toleration

Thirdly, let us see what the duty of toleration requires of those who are distinguished from the rest of society – from the ‘laity’ as they like to call it – by some ecclesiastical title or position, whether they are called bishops, priests, presbyters, ministers, or by some other name. This is not the place to investigate the origins of clerical authority or dignity. My point is this: whatever its origin, since it is an ecclesiastical authority, it should be confined within the bounds of the church; it cannot be extended to civil matters in any way, seeing that the church itself is utterly separate and distinct from the commonwealth and civil matters. On both sides the bounds are fixed and immovable. You are confounding heaven and earth, things totally distinct from each other, if you try to run together these two associations, which are completely and utterly different from each other in origin, purpose, and substance. Hence no matter what ecclesiastical dignity a person may enjoy, he cannot deprive anyone who does not belong to his own church or faith, of life, liberty, or any part of his

worldly goods for the sake of religion. For what is forbidden to the church as a whole cannot be permitted by ecclesiastical law to any member of it.

But it is not enough for clergymen to refrain from violence, plunder, and persecution in all its forms. One who professes to be a successor of the Apostles and has taken upon himself the task of teaching has a further obligation – to advise his people of their duties of peace and goodwill towards all men, towards those who are in error as well as to the orthodox, towards those who share their beliefs as well as those who differ in point of belief or ritual. He must encourage charity, gentleness, and tolerance in all of them, whether they are private citizens or political leaders, if there are any in his congregation, and he must restrain and mitigate their aversion towards those who are heterodox, whether it is inspired by their own fierce passion for their religion and sect or has been craftily instilled in their minds by others. I will not enumerate all the great advantages that would accrue to both church and commonwealth if the pulpits resounded with a message of peace and tolerance, because I do not want to appear to say anything to the discredit of men whose dignity I would not wish to see impaired by anyone, even by themselves. But I do say that this is what needs to be done, and anyone who claims to be a minister of the divine word and a preacher of the Gospel of peace and who teaches differently is either ignorant or careless of the task entrusted to him, and in either case he must one day answer for it to the Prince of Peace. If Christians are admonished not to seek vengeance even when they are repeatedly provoked by wrongs, ‘even to seventy times seven’,¹⁵ how much more should they avoid all anger, hostility, and violence when they have suffered nothing from another person, and most of all should they be careful not to harm those who have done no harm to them, and particularly not to give trouble to people who are minding their own business and are anxious only to worship God in the way they believe is most acceptable to him without concern for the opinions of men, and to embrace the religion which offers them the greatest hope of salvation.

In matters of domestic economy and private property and in questions of health, it is up to each person to decide for himself what will be appropriate; he is allowed to follow his own judgement as to what is best. No one complains if his neighbour makes a poor job of looking after his domestic affairs; no one gets angry with someone who makes a poor job

¹⁵ Cf. Matthew 18: 22.

of sowing his fields or marrying off his daughter; no one corrects a man who is squandering his money in taverns. A person may build or demolish, and spend as he pleases; no one says anything, he is allowed to get on with it. But if he does not regularly attend the public place of worship or if, when he does go, he does not make the approved ritual gestures, or if he does not bring his children to be initiated into the ceremonies of one or another church, the grumbling starts, there is a public outcry, and it ends in a prosecution. Everyone is keen to punish such a crime, and the fanatics can hardly restrain themselves from assaulting and robbing him until he is brought into court, and the judge's sentence delivers him to prison or execution or confiscates his property.

Clerical orators of every sect may, where they can, confute and confound by means of arguments other people's errors, but they must not touch their persons. Should they run out of effective arguments, they must not resort to the drastic instruments of a different court; these are not for men of the church to wield. They cannot borrow the rods and axes of the ruler to help out their eloquence and instruction, for fear that as they proclaim their love of truth, a burning passion for fire and sword will betray their secret appetite for domination. It will be difficult to persuade intelligent persons that you actively and sincerely desire to save your brother from the fires of hell in the world to come if in this world, with dry eyes and cordial assent, you hand him over to the executioner to be burned.

(iv) Duties of rulers with regard to mutual toleration

Fourthly and finally, we must look at the role of the ruler, who certainly plays the most important role of all in the matter of toleration.

We showed above that a ruler has no care for souls, no care in his *official* capacity, I mean, if I can put it that way, because a ruler operates by means of legal commands and penal coercion; however, a charitable care for souls by way of teaching, advice, and persuasion can be denied to no one. Each person then has a care for his own soul and must be allowed to exercise this care. You will say: what if he neglects the care of his soul? I reply: what if he neglects his health; what if he neglects his property – things that are closer to the ruler's jurisdiction – will the ruler fashion a special edict to forbid a person to become poor or sick? The laws attempt, so far as they can, to protect the property and health of subjects from

force or fraud on the part of others, not from neglect or waste on the part of the owner. No one can be compelled to be healthy or prosperous against his will. Even God cannot save people against their will. Nevertheless, suppose a prince does wish to make his subjects acquire wealth or look after their physical health. Will he make a law that they may consult only Roman doctors, and will everyone be required to live by their prescription? Will they not be allowed to take any medication or food unless it is prepared in the Vatican or cooked in the kitchens of Geneva? Or will all his subjects be obliged by law to practise commerce or music so that their homes may be prosperous and cultured? Or shall every individual be made an inn-keeper or a smith because some people keep their family in fair comfort and get to be well-off by these skills?

But you will say: there are a thousand ways to make money, but only one way to salvation. That is a very good thing to say, especially for those who want to try to force people to go one particular way; for if there were several ways, there could be no excuse for compulsion at all. But if I am pressing straight on to Jerusalem with all my strength, following the holy guidebook, why am I beaten because (it may be) I am not wearing the proper boots or have not washed or cut my hair in a particular fashion, or because I eat meat on the journey or take particular foods that are good for my stomach or my health? Or because I avoid byways on either side that seem to me to lead to cliffs and thorn bushes? Or because, among different tracks going the same way on the same road, I pick the one that appears least winding and muddy? Or because I have come to feel that some people are not sufficiently serious, while others are just too strait-laced for me to be happy to travel in their company? Or because I have, or do not have, a guide for my journey who wears a mitre or a white stole? Surely if we weigh it all up, most of the points that pit Christian brethren so bitterly against each other, even though they have identical correct beliefs about the essence of religion, are no more significant than these, and they may be observed or ignored without danger to religion or the salvation of souls, so long as there is no superstition or hypocrisy.

But suppose we grant to the fanatics and to those who condemn every way but their own that these incidental details imply different ways that lead in different directions, where will that get us? Grant that only one of these ways is the true way of salvation. Among the thousand paths that people take, it is not self-evident which is the right one, and the path that leads to heaven is not more surely revealed by the ruler's responsibility for

the commonwealth or by his right to make laws than by an individual's own searching. Suppose I am sick and feeble in body, wasting away with a serious disease, and suppose there is only one cure and no one knows what it is. Is it the ruler's job to prescribe the remedy simply because there is only one, and it is not known which of the many possibilities it is? Will it be safe to follow the ruler's instructions simply because there is only one thing I can do to avoid death? We should not treat these questions as the privilege of any one set of people; they are for every individual to investigate by his own efforts, thinking, searching, judging, and reflecting for himself, in sincerity of heart. Princes are born superior in power to other mortals but equal by nature. Neither their right to rule nor their skill in ruling entails certain knowledge of other things, let alone of true religion. If it did, how does it come about that in matters of religion the lords of different countries differ so much from one another?

But let us grant the plausibility of the notion that the way to eternal life is better known to the prince than to his subjects, or at least that it is safer or more convenient to obey his instructions given the uncertainty of the question. In that case you will say: if he bade you make your living by trade, would you refuse because you doubt you would make money that way? I reply: I would become a merchant, if the prince told me to. For if the business failed, he has the resources to compensate me fully in some other way for the time and trouble I wasted in trade; and if he is willing to preserve me from hunger and poverty, as he claims to be, he can easily do that, even if I lost all my property when my unsuccessful business venture failed. But this is not the case with the future life. If my efforts are misdirected in that case; if my hopes are disappointed, no ruler can make good the damage, lessen the evil, or repair my loss in whole or in part. What guarantee can be given of the kingdom of heaven?

You will say perhaps: in sacred matters we credit the church, not the civil ruler, with the certain judgement which all must follow. The civil ruler orders us all to observe the rulings of the church, and uses his authority to ensure that no one behaves or believes otherwise than as the church teaches, and therefore the decision is in the hands of the church. The ruler himself obeys, and requires obedience from the rest of the people. I reply: anyone may see that the name 'church', so venerable in the time of the Apostles, has been frequently misappropriated in subsequent centuries in order to impose upon people. Anyway in the present case it gives us no help. I maintain that the one narrow path that leads

to heaven is no better known to rulers than to private persons. Hence I cannot safely follow a leader who is as ignorant of the way as I am and is necessarily less concerned about my salvation than I am myself. Were there not numerous kings of the Jews of whom it may be said that any Israelite who followed them would have abandoned the true worship for idolatry and incurred certain destruction by his blind obedience?

Yet you tell me to have confidence, everything is fine, because in our day rulers do not pronounce their own decisions about religious questions for the people to follow but those of the church, and simply give them civil sanction. But then I ask: which church exactly? Obviously, the one that pleases the prince. As if in coercing me into one church or another by force of law and punishment, he is not imposing his own judgement about religion! What difference does it make whether he takes me there himself, or employs others to do it? In either case, I depend on his will, and in either case, he is making a decision about my salvation. Was a Jew much safer when he followed Baal by the king's edict, because he had been assured that the king made no decisions about religion on his own authority, and made no regulations for his subjects about divine worship, unless they had been approved and certified as divine by the council of priests and by the initiates of that religion? If then any church's religion is true and saving because the prelates, priests, and followers of that sect praise it, preach it, and give it all the support they can, what religion will be erroneous, false, or fatal? I have doubts about the faith of the Socinians,¹⁶ I have reservations about the religion of the Papists or of the Lutherans – can I feel more secure about joining one of their churches at the behest of the ruler simply because he neither commands nor sanctions anything in the matter of religion except by the authority and advice of the doctors of that church?

But to tell the truth, a church – if we should use the word ‘church’ of a set of clergymen making decrees – usually adapts itself to the court rather than the court to the church. We know well enough what the church was like when the prince was orthodox and what it was like when he was Arian.¹⁷ And if these instances are too remote, the recent history

¹⁶ Socinians traced their unorthodox views on the nature of Christ back to Fausto Sozzini (1539–64). Locke is thought to have had some sympathy with their position.

¹⁷ Locke alludes to the fourth-century controversy, initiated by Arius, over the relation of the Son to the Father within the Trinity. Whereas the Emperor Constantine had been orthodox, his successor, Constantius, was an Arian.

of England offers us some good examples from the reigns of Henry, Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth of how nimbly clergymen adapt decrees, articles of faith, forms of worship, and everything to the prince's will. These princes held such different religious beliefs and gave such different orders that only a madman – I almost said only an atheist – would assert that an honest person, a worshipper of the true God, could obey their decrees on religious matters without compromising his conscience and his respect for God. Need I say more? If a king presumes to make laws about another person's religion, it is all the same whether he does so by his own judgement or by the authority of a church, that is by the opinions of other men. The judgement of clergymen, whose conflicts and controversies are only too well known, is no more sensible and no more secure; and their support, fragmented as it is, adds no strength to the civil power. However, it is worth remarking that princes do not normally attach importance to the opinions and support of clergy who do not favour their own faith and form of worship.

But the heart of the matter is this, and it settles the question: even if the ruler's religious belief is better than mine, even if the way he directs me to go is truly that of the Gospel, it will not save me if I am not sincerely convinced of it. No way that I follow against the protests of my conscience will ever bring me to the mansions of the blest. I can grow rich by a profession I dislike, I can be cured by medicines I view with suspicion, but I cannot be saved by a religion I reject. It is useless for an unbeliever to adopt a certain mode of external behaviour, since pleasing God requires faith and inner sincerity. However attractive a remedy may be and recommended by others, it is useless to give it to a patient if his stomach will reject it as soon as it is taken, nor should you force a medicine into a person which by some quirk of his constitution will turn to poison inside him. One thing is certain about religion, whatever else may be called in question, that no religion which I do not believe to be true can be true for me or of any use to me. A ruler is wasting his time forcing his subjects to attend his own religious services on a pretext of saving their souls. If they believe, they will come of their own accord; if they do not believe, they will perish anyway, even if they come. You can say all you like about your goodwill for another person, you can strive as hard as you like for their salvation – a person cannot be forced to be saved. At the end of the day he must be left to himself and his own conscience.

Duties of rulers with regard to toleration of ritual or external worship

So at last we have people liberated from the dominion of others in matters of religion. What now will they do? Everyone knows and agrees that God should be publicly worshipped – why else are we compelled to attend public services? That is why people living in this freedom must join an ecclesiastical association, so that they may attend services not only for their mutual spiritual development, but also to give public witness that they are worshippers of God and offer the divine Godhead a form of worship of which they are not ashamed and do not believe to be unworthy or displeasing to him. They also seek to attract others to a love of religion and truth by the purity of their doctrine, by the holiness of their lives, and by the decent grace of their ritual, and to provide for those other things that cannot be done by individuals privately.

It is these religious associations, which I call churches, that the ruler has a duty to tolerate. For a number of people meeting together for services in this way are engaged in an activity which is perfectly permissible for private individuals on their own, namely, the salvation of their souls; and there is no difference in this respect between the church favoured by the court and the others that are distinct from it.

In every church the two most important elements for us to consider are external worship or ritual, and doctrine. We must deal with each of them separately, in order to see more clearly the full scope of the argument for toleration.

First, a ruler cannot use the sanction of civil law to enforce the use of any ecclesiastical rites or ceremonies for the worship of God even in his own church, and still less in other people's churches. This is not simply because churches are free associations, but because there is only one reason to approve the offering of any particular thing to God, and that is the worshippers' confidence that it will be acceptable to him. Nothing done without this confidence is permissible or acceptable to God. Since the purpose of religion is to please God, it is contradictory to order a man who is permitted liberty in religion to displease him in the very act of worship.

You will say: do you then deny to the ruler the power that everyone would allow him over indifferent matters?¹⁸ If you take this power away,

¹⁸ Locke here uses the Greek term *adiaphoras*, which is equivalent to the Latin term, *indifferentes*, that he normally uses to describe indifferent acts.

will there be any subject on which he can legislate? In reply, I concede that indifferent matters, and these alone perhaps, are subject to legislative power.

- (1) But it does not follow from this that it is permissible for a ruler to decree whatever he pleases on any indifferent matter. The end and measure of legislation is the public good. The sanction of law cannot simply be given to anything, however indifferent, if it is not in the interest of the commonwealth.
- (2) Even things that are completely indifferent in their own nature are put beyond the jurisdiction of the ruler when they are introduced into a church and made an element of divine worship. For in this use they have no connection with civil matters at all. The only issue now is the salvation of souls, and it makes no difference to my neighbour or to my country whether one rite is adopted or another. The observation or omission of ceremonies in church services does not affect other people's lives, liberty, or property. For example, one may grant that washing a new-born baby with water is in its nature a matter of indifference. Grant too that a ruler may impose it by law, if he is aware that such washing helps to cure or prevent some disease to which infants are liable, and believes it to be so important that it needs to be prescribed by law. But will anyone therefore argue that by the same right a ruler may also prescribe by law that infants must be washed by a priest in a sacred font for the purification of their souls? Or that they have to be initiated into certain rituals? One sees at a glance that these things are totally different. Just suppose that the baby is the child of a Jew, and the thing speaks for itself; after all, a Christian ruler may well have Jewish subjects. Are you maintaining that one should inflict on a Christian an insult about a thing indifferent in itself which you acknowledge should not be inflicted on a Jew, namely, to force him to do something in the way of religious ritual which is against his beliefs?
- (3) Things indifferent in themselves cannot be made an element of divine worship by human authority and at men's discretion. Since it is not a natural property of indifferent things to be peculiarly suited to propitiate the Deity, no human power or authority can lend them the dignity and excellence to win his favour. In social life any use of things indifferent in themselves which God has not prohibited is

free and permissible, and therefore in these cases there is room for human discretion or authority. But there is not the same freedom in religion and ritual. In divine worship the only ground of the legitimacy of indifferent things is their institution by God. By his certain command he has given them the dignity to be a part of the worship which the majesty of the supreme Deity will deign to approve and accept from poor sinful men. And it will not be enough to answer God's indignant question, 'Who required this?' by asserting that it was the ruler that ordered it. If civil jurisdiction extends that far, what will not be permitted in religion? What a mass of senseless rituals and superstitious novelties God's worshippers will have to accept, even against the protests and condemnation of their own conscience, just because rulers give them the support of their authority. For most worship consists of the use by a religion of things indifferent in their own nature, and the only way in which a ritual may be wrong is that God has not authorized it. Sprinkling with water and the use of bread and wine are things that are supremely indifferent in their own nature and in social life. Could they have been applied to sacred use and made part of divine worship without God's institution? If any human authority or civil power could do this, why could it not also prescribe as an item of divine worship a meal of fish and beer in the holy eucharist? Why not cut the throats of animals in a temple and sprinkle the blood, or purify by water or fire? Why not innumerable other such things that are indifferent outside religion but as hateful to God as the sacrifice of a dog if introduced into divine worship without his authorization? What is the difference between a puppy and a goat in comparison with the divine nature – which is equally and infinitely remote from all affinity with matter – except that God willed the use of the one species of animal in ritual and worship and rejected the other?

You see then that ordinary things, however much they may be subject to the civil power, cannot be introduced on that ground into a sacred liturgy and imposed upon religious groups; for as soon as they enter into religious ritual, they cease to be indifferent. The intention of any worshipper is to please God and win his favour. He cannot do this if, at another's behest, he offers something to God that he believes will offend him because God has not commanded it. This is not to placate God, but

knowingly and deliberately to provoke him and show him open contempt, which is incompatible with the purpose of worship.

You will say: if human discretion has no place in divine worship, how is it that authority is given to churches to decide about times and places and so on? I reply: some things are *part* of a sacred rite and others are *incidentals*. A ‘part’ is what is believed to be required by God and to be pleasing to him, and is therefore necessary. ‘Incidentals’ are things which are essential in a general way to a ritual, but their specific form is not fixed, and therefore they are indifferent. Examples include the time and place of worship, the worshipper’s clothing, and his physical posture. For the divine will has not given any specific ruling on these matters. Let me explain. Among the Jews, time and place and the dress of those who performed the rituals were not simply incidentals but a part of the cult: if they altered or omitted any item, they could not expect their worship to be pleasing and acceptable to God. But Christians have the liberty of the Gospel, and for them such things are merely incidentals of the rite, which the good sense of each church may handle as it believes this or that manner best serves the end of edification, with order and grace. However, for those who are persuaded under the Gospel that the sabbath day has been set apart by God for his worship, the sabbath is not an incidental but a part of divine worship which cannot be changed or neglected.

Secondly, rulers cannot prohibit the sacred liturgy and ritual adopted by any church in their religious assemblies. For in that way they would destroy the church itself, the end of a church being to worship God freely in its own fashion. You will say: so, if they want to sacrifice a child or – as was once said falsely of the Christians – engage in promiscuous conduct, should the ruler tolerate these things simply because they take place in a church service? I reply: these things are not permitted at home or in civil life, and therefore they are not permitted in a religious gathering or ritual, either. If, however, they should want to sacrifice a calf, that (I say) should not be forbidden by law. Meliboeus,¹⁹ the owner of the beast, may kill his calf at home and burn in the fire any part of it he wishes. That does no harm to anyone, takes nothing from any other man’s possessions. Hence cutting a calf’s throat is likewise permitted in divine worship; it is for the worshippers to decide whether it pleases God. The ruler’s only concern is

¹⁹ Cf. Virgil, *Eclogues* 3.1: *Dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus: an Meliboei?* ‘Tell me, Damoetas, whose cattle are those? Do they belong to Meliboeus?’

to ensure that it does no harm to the commonwealth, and causes no loss to anyone else's life or property. Hence what could be used for a meal can be used for a sacrifice. But in a situation where it would be for the good of the country to avoid all slaughter of cattle in order to rebuild herds decimated by disease, it is clear that the ruler might forbid all his subjects to kill calves for any purpose. In this case, however, the law is made about a political matter rather than a religious matter. It is the killing of calves, not their sacrifice, that is forbidden.

You now see the difference between church and commonwealth. What the ruler allows in the commonwealth, he may not forbid in the church. What other subjects may do in their daily lives, the law cannot and should not forbid to be done in a church service or by members of this or that sect for sacred purposes. If at home one may legally take bread or wine sitting at table or kneeling, the civil law should not forbid one from doing the same in a sacred ritual, even though the use of the bread and wine in that case is very different, being adapted in the church for divine worship and acquiring a mystical meaning. Things that in themselves are harmful to the community in everyday life and are prohibited by legislation in the common interest cannot become legitimate when employed in a church for a sacred purpose or expect to go unpunished. But the ruler has to be particularly careful not to use the ground of public interest as a pretext for stifling any church's liberty. On the contrary, nothing that is lawful in everyday life and apart from God's worship may be forbidden by the civil law from being done in divine worship or in holy places.

You will say: what if some particular church is idolatrous? Has the ruler a duty to tolerate it too? I reply: is there a right that can be given to a ruler to suppress an idolatrous church which will not also, at the appropriate time and place, bring down an orthodox church? It is relevant to recall that civil power is the same everywhere, and every prince regards his own religion as orthodox. Hence, if on a religious question a civil ruler has been given an authorization which legitimates in Geneva²⁰ the extermination with violence and bloodshed of a religion which is held to be false and idolatrous, by the same right it will suppress the orthodox church in the neighbouring state and the Christian religion among the Indians. Civil power may either change everything to suit the beliefs of the prince, or it may change nothing. Once it is allowed to introduce

²⁰ Locke refers a number of times to Calvinism as the form of Christianity practised in Geneva.

anything in religion by means of law, force, and penalties, there will be no limit to it. It will be allowed to use the same weapons to bring everything into line with the rule of truth which the ruler has dreamed up for himself.

No one, and I mean no one, should be deprived of his worldly goods on account of religion, including Americans²¹ who have been subjected to a Christian prince; they should not be stripped of their lives or property because they do not accept the Christian religion. If they believe they please God and attain salvation by their ancestral rites, they should be left to God and themselves. I will retrace the story from the beginning. A small, weak band of Christians, totally destitute, arrive at a territory inhabited by pagans; as foreigners they approach the indigenous people for material assistance, as one human being to another, which is normal. They are given the necessities of life; they are allowed places to settle, the two groups become one people. The Christian religion puts down roots and expands, but is not yet the stronger party. Peace, friendship, and good faith are still maintained, and equal rights are preserved. In the course of time their ruler converts to the Christian side, and the Christians become the stronger party. It is only then that it becomes a duty to trample upon agreements and violate rights to get rid of idolatry. From then on, innocent pagans, scrupulous observers of justice in that they have not offended against good morals and the civil law, are to be stripped of their lives, property, and ancestral lands, if they will not abandon their ancient worship and transfer their allegiance to new and foreign rites. At last it becomes quite evident what zeal for the church means, at least when it is combined with the passion to dominate, and it is clearly revealed how easily religion and the salvation of souls serve as a cover for robbery and lust for power.

If you believe that idolatry has to be exterminated in some place, change the name of the place, and the same principle will apply to you.²² For it is no more right for pagans in America to lose their property than for Christians in a European kingdom who dissent from the court's church; and religion is no more reason to curtail civil rights in the one place than in the other.

²¹ The native peoples of North America.

²² Horace, *Satires* 1.1.69–70: *mutato nomine de te / fabula narratur*: ‘with a change of name the story is about you’.

You will say: idolatry is a sin, and therefore not be tolerated. I reply: if you say, ‘idolatry is a sin and therefore to be studiously avoided’, your reasoning is absolutely correct. But if you say that it is a sin and therefore to be punished by the ruler, that is not correct. It is not the ruler’s business to direct the law or draw the sword against everything that he believes to be a sin in the eyes of God. By general consent, greed is a sin, so is not helping others in need, so are idleness and many other things of that sort; but who has ever held that a ruler should punish them? Even in the places where they are regarded as sins, they are not condemned by law and legally suppressed, and the reason is that they do no damage to other people’s possessions nor disturb the public peace. Laws everywhere are silent about liars and perjurers, except in certain cases in which the issue is not an oath before God or the immorality of the action but an attempt to do harm to the commonwealth or a neighbour. And what if a pagan or Muslim prince believes Christianity to be false and displeasing to God? Does he not, by the same right and in the same measure, have a duty to exterminate Christians?

You will say: extermination of idolaters is commanded by the law of Moses. I reply: the law of Moses is right to command this, but the law of Moses does not obligate Christians. You will surely not insist that we should follow every bit of legislation given to the Jews; nor will it help you to cite the trite old distinction (useless in this case) between moral, judicial, and ritual laws. For no positive law of any kind obligates anyone except those for whom it was made. ‘Hear, O Israel’ effectively restricts the obligation of the Mosaic law to the people of Israel.²³ This in itself is enough to refute those who want to prescribe capital punishment for idolaters on the basis of the law of Moses. But I would like to develop the argument a little further.

For the Jewish commonwealth there were two kinds of idolaters. First, there were those who had been initiated into the Mosaic rites and made members of that commonwealth but had fallen away from the worship of the God of Israel. These were treated as traitors and rebels, guilty of high treason. For the commonwealth of the Jews was very different from others, being based on theocracy. And there was not, and could not be, any such distinction as was made, after Christ’s birth, between church and commonwealth. Among that people the laws about the worship of the one invisible Deity were civil laws and part of a regime in which God

²³ Deuteronomy 5: 1.

himself was the legislator. If you can show me anywhere a commonwealth based on that kind of juridical foundation, I will admit that in that commonwealth ecclesiastical laws should be accepted as civil laws, and that all the subjects can and should be barred from foreign worship and alien rites by the sword of the ruler. But under the Gospel there is absolutely no such thing as a Christian commonwealth. There are, I agree, many kingdoms and countries that have adopted Christianity, but they have retained and preserved the form of state and government which they formerly had, about which Christ in his law has said nothing. He has taught the faith and the morals by which individuals may gain eternal life. He did not, however, institute a commonwealth; he has introduced no new form of government peculiar to his own people; he has armed no ruler with a sword, to force people to adopt the faith or worship which he put before them or to bar them from the practices of a different religion.

Secondly, foreigners and those who were not members of the commonwealth of Israel were not forcibly compelled to accept Mosaic rituals, but in the same section (*Exodus 22: 20–21*) in which Israelite idolaters are threatened with death, the law warns that no one should trouble or oppress a stranger. Admittedly, the seven nations that possessed the land promised to Israel were to be utterly exterminated, but that was not because they were idolaters. If it were, why did the Israelites have to spare the Moabites and other tribes who were also idolatrous? But since God was king of the Hebrew people in a very particular sense, he could not permit veneration of another Deity (which was properly the crime of treason) in the country which was his own kingdom, namely, the land of Canaan. Such open revolt was not compatible with the political government of Jehovah in that territory. Hence they had to expel all idolatry from the borders of the kingdom, for idolatry was the acknowledgement, against the fundamental law of government, of another king, that is, of another God. The inhabitants too had to be driven out, so that vacant and unrestricted possession might be given to the Israelites. And that is clearly the reason why the descendants of Esau and Lot exterminated the peoples called Emmim and Horim when they invaded their territories which God had transferred to them by what is clearly the same right, as will be readily apparent to anyone who reads the second chapter of *Deuteronomy*.²⁴ This is also the reason why, though idolatry had been

²⁴ *Deuteronomy 2: 1–12.*

banished from the bounds of the land of Canaan, they still did not proceed against all idolaters. Joshua made an agreement to spare the family of Habab and the whole people of the Gideonites. Everywhere among the Hebrews were captives who were idolaters. Even beyond the limits of the promised land, territories were conquered by David and Solomon as far as the Euphrates, and reduced to provinces. Of so many captives, so many peoples subjected to the authority of the Hebrews, not one, so far as we can see, was ever punished for idolatry, of which they were certainly all guilty; no one was forced into the religion of Moses and the worship of the true God by punishment. Any proselyte who desired to have citizenship also accepted the law of the commonwealth of Israel, that is, its religion. But he did so willingly of his own accord, not forcibly because he was compelled to do so by the ruler; he sought it eagerly as a privilege, not submitting to it against his will as a token of obedience. As soon as he became a citizen, he was liable to the laws of the commonwealth, by which idolatry was forbidden within the bounds and limits of the land of Canaan. Nothing was laid down in that law about external territories and peoples beyond those limits.

Duties of rulers with regard to the toleration of belief and doctrine

So much for outward worship. It remains to discuss belief.

Some of the doctrines of churches are practical, others are speculative. Though both consist in a knowledge of truth, speculative doctrines end in belief and understanding, whereas practical doctrines are directed towards the will and morals.

(i) Speculative doctrines

Now with regard to speculative doctrines and what are called articles of faith, which require only to be believed, there is no way that civil law can introduce them into a church. What is the point of requiring by law what a person cannot do however hard he may try? It does not lie in our will that we should believe this thing or that thing to be true. But I have said enough about this above. 'Well, let him profess that he believes.' What? Lie before God and men for the salvation of his soul? A fine religion! If the ruler wants people to be saved in this way, he seems to have little

understanding of the way to salvation; and if he is not acting for their salvation, why is he so very concerned about articles of faith that he commands them by law?

Again, no ruler should prohibit the holding or teaching of any speculative belief in any church; for speculative beliefs have nothing to do with the civil rights of his subjects. If a Catholic believes that what another man would call bread is truly the body of Christ, he does not hurt his neighbour. If a Jew does not believe that the New Testament is the word of God, he does not change any civil laws. If a pagan has doubts about both Testaments, he should not therefore be punished as a bad citizen. Whether anyone believes these things or not, the ruler's authority and the citizens' property may still be safe and secure. I am absolutely willing to admit that these are false and absurd beliefs, but laws have no business with the truth of beliefs, only with the protection and security of the individual's property and of the commonwealth. We need not regret this. For truth would certainly have done very well, if she were ever left to herself. She has received little help, and never will, from the dominion of the powerful, to whom the truth is rarely known and seldom pleasing. She does not require force to get entrance to people's minds, and takes no instruction from the voice of the law. The reign of error rests upon borrowed and imported forces. If truth does not strike the understanding with its own light, it cannot do it with outside help. But that is enough on this subject. We must move on to practical beliefs.

(ii) Practical doctrines

Good morals, which are a major part of religion and sincere piety, also play a role in civil life; the safety of the commonwealth as well as the salvation of souls depends upon them. Hence moral actions belong to both the external and the internal court, and are subject to the jurisdiction of both the civil governor, which is the ruler and the individual governor, which is conscience. The problem here is that one governor may violate the right of the other, and a conflict may arise between the guardian of the peace and the guardian of the soul. But if we give due weight to the principles we laid out above about their respective limits, we shall easily settle this whole issue.

Every mortal has an immortal soul, capable of eternal happiness or eternal misery, whose salvation depends upon whether in this life each

person has done the actions and held the beliefs that are necessary to win the Deity's favour and which God has prescribed. Hence it follows (1) that a person is obliged above all to observe these things and put all his care, zeal, and diligence into discovering them and putting them into practice. For this mortal state contains nothing that is in any way comparable with that eternal state.²⁵ It follows also (2) that each individual alone is responsible for their own salvation; for a person in no way violates the right of others by practising an erroneous ritual, nor does he do them an injury by not sharing their correct beliefs on divine matters, nor does his damnation diminish their happy state. I do not mean by this to exclude all friendly advice and willingness to refute errors; these are very much Christian duties. Anyone may devote as much reasoning and exhortation as he pleases to another's salvation, but there must be no violence and no compulsion, and nothing should be done in this context for the sake of control over others. No one is obliged to accept another person's advice or authority in this matter further than he himself believes it to be right; each person is the last and highest judge of his own salvation; it is his own business, and only his; nobody else stands to lose anything.

Besides his immortal soul, man also has a life in this world, a fragile life of uncertain duration which requires earthly goods to sustain it, and these he must get (or has already got) by labour and industry. For the things needful for a prosperous and happy life do not grow by themselves. Hence these things become a second concern for man. But such is human wickedness, that most people would prefer to enjoy things earned by other people's labour than to struggle to get them by their own. For the sake therefore of defending the wealth and resources he has already won or of protecting his means of winning them, such as his freedom and good health, a person must enter into association with others, the purpose of which is to secure each person in the private possession of things useful for life by mutual aid and united forces. Meantime the concern for his eternal soul is left to each individual, since salvation cannot be won by another person's industry, and one man's loss of salvation cannot hurt anyone else, nor can his hope of salvation be taken away by force. But though in coming together into a community²⁶ people have arranged for

²⁵ Cf. Romans 8: 18.

²⁶ Locke here uses the term *civitas* for the first stage of society which men enter by the first stage of the social contract; their appointment of a ruler establishes the fully formed commonwealth.

mutual assistance to protect their earthly goods, even so they can still be expelled from their properties by robbery and fraud on the part of their fellow citizens or by attack from foreign enemies. The remedy in the first case is found in laws, in the second case, in arms, wealth, and a large population, and in all these matters the association has mandated responsibility and authority to the ruler. This was the origin of legislative authority, which is the sovereign authority in any commonwealth, these are the purposes for which it was instituted, and these are the limits that restrict it. It is meant to protect the private possessions of individuals and thus the people as a whole and its common welfare, so that it may flourish and grow in peace and prosperity, and its own strength may keep it as safe as possible from attack by others.

On these premises, it is easy to see the end which governs the ruler's prerogative in making laws – it is the good of the people in this world, that is their earthly good, which is also the one and only argument for entering society and the unique and single end of a commonwealth once established. It is easy also to see, on the other side, the liberty that remains with private individuals in things concerning the future life – it is that every person should act as he believes is pleasing to God, on whose good pleasure²⁷ human salvation depends. For obedience is owed first to God, and then to the laws.

But you will say: what if a ruler has decreed something which seems to the private conscience to be wrong? I reply: this will rarely happen if the commonwealth is governed with good faith and the ruler's policies are truly directed to the common good of the citizens. But if it should happen, I insist that a private person must not do any action that his conscience tells him is wrong, and he must submit to any penalty which it is not wrong for him to bear. For an individual's private judgement concerning a law made for the public good on a political matter does not negate his obligation or merit toleration. If, on the other hand, a law deals with matters that are beyond the ruler's province – for example, a law that forces a people or part of it to adopt an alien religion and practise different forms of worship – those who disagree with it are not bound by such a law. For the purpose of entering into political association is solely to protect the individual's possession of the things of this life, and it has no other purpose. Care of one's soul and of heavenly matters (which have

²⁷ Cf. Ephesians 1: 9.

nothing to do with the commonwealth and cannot be subject to it) are the exclusive preserve of the private individual. Hence the business of the commonwealth is the protection of life and of the things related to this life, and the duty of the ruler is to assure them to those who have them. Therefore these worldly goods cannot be taken away from one party and given to another at the whim of the ruler, nor can private possession of them be transferred from one citizen to another, even by law, for a reason that has nothing to do with his fellow citizens, namely, his religion. For, whether it be true or false, a person's religion does not damage the worldly interests of other citizens, and only worldly interests are subject to the commonwealth.

But you will say: what if the ruler believes he is acting for the public good in this? I reply: a false private judgement on the part of an individual in no way exempts him from his legal obligation, and likewise what I may call the ruler's *private* judgement gives him no new right to legislate for his subjects, which he was not granted at the formation of the commonwealth and indeed could not have been given; much less if his motive is to reward his partisans, the members of his sect, and enrich them with spoils taken from others. You ask: what if the ruler believes that his commands are within his authority and in the best interests of the commonwealth, but his subjects take the opposite view? Who will be judge between them? I reply: God alone. For there is no judge on earth between a legislator and a people. In this case, I insist, God is the only arbiter. At the last judgement he will requite each person according to his desert, according to whether he has acted for the public good and peace and piety, sincerely and in accordance with right and justice. You will say: what will happen in the meantime? I reply: first care for your soul, and do all you can for peace, although there are few who believe it is peace when they see desolation wrought.²⁸ Men have two ways of working out conflicts: one is by law, the other by violence; and in the nature of the case the latter begins where the former ends. It is not my purpose to inquire how far the jurisdiction of the ruler extends in different nations; I know only what inevitably happens when a dispute arises in the absence of a judge. You will say:²⁹ in that case the ruler, having

²⁸ An allusion to Tacitus, *Agricola* 30, in which Calgacus is represented as exhorting his people in Scotland to resist the Romans who, he says, 'wreak devastation and call it peace' (*solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*).

²⁹ Translating the punctuation *Dices: Igitur magistratus*, as in the 1689 Gouda text.

the greater resources, will do what he believes is to his own advantage. I reply: undoubtedly he will, but we are not here discussing how hypothetical situations will work out, but seeking a rule of right conduct.

Let us now look at some particular questions:³⁰

- (1) I say, first, that a ruler should not tolerate any doctrines which are detrimental to human society and prejudicial to the good morals which are essential for the preservation of civil society. But examples of these are rare in any church. No sect normally reaches such a level of insanity that it feels entitled to put forward as religious dogmas any doctrines that plainly undermine the foundations of society and that are therefore condemned by the whole human race; for by such doctrines their own property, peace, and reputation will be put at risk.
- (2) A more subtle but also more dangerous problem for a commonwealth arises from those who claim for themselves and their followers some special prerogative contrary to the civil laws, which is concealed in a form of words intended to deceive. Perhaps you will never find any party so outspoken as to teach openly that promises need not be kept, that a prince may be deposed by any sect that so wishes, or that dominion over all things belongs to themselves alone.³¹ Open and naked avowal of these doctrines would immediately catch the eye of the ruler and focus the attention of the commonwealth on preventing the spread of this evil concealed in its midst. But there are those who say the same thing in other words. What else do people mean by teaching that promises to heretics need not be kept?³² What they mean, of course, is that they themselves have the privilege of breaking promises, since all who are outside their own communion are declared to be heretics or may be so declared if the occasion arises. What do they mean by teaching that an excommunicated king forfeits his kingdom but that they assume for themselves the power to strip kings of their kingdoms, since they claim for their own hierarchy an exclusive right to excommunicate?³³ The doctrine that dominion is

³⁰ That is, particular questions with regard to practical beliefs.

³¹ Locke is alluding here, as he makes clear later in the paragraph, to doctrines that had been held by various religious groups.

³² The doctrine that promises to heretics need not to be kept (*fides non servanda haereticis*) was attributed to the Roman Catholic Church.

³³ Excommunication of a ruler by the pope was held to release subjects from their obligation to obey that ruler; Pope Pius V, for example, excommunicated Elizabeth I of England to this effect in 1570.

founded in grace, in the last analysis, gives possession of everything to those who hold this doctrine, since they will never fail to believe or to profess that they themselves are the truly pious, the true believers.³⁴ Such people can have no right to be tolerated by a ruler; for they give the faithful, the religious, the orthodox (i.e. themselves) some privilege or power in civil matters above the rest of mankind, or they claim for themselves, under the pretext of religion, some power over people who are outside the communion of their own church or in some way separate. Nor should the ruler extend toleration to those who refuse to teach that people who differ from them in religion must be tolerated. For what else are such people actually saying but that, given the opportunity, they will attack the laws of the commonwealth and the property and liberty of the citizens? And that the one thing they seek from the ruler is to be given immunity and liberty until they have sufficient strength and resources to make the attempt?

(3) A church can have no right to be tolerated by a ruler if those who join it transfer their loyalty and obedience to another prince simply by joining. Any ruler who granted such toleration would be giving a foothold in his own territories and cities to a foreign jurisdiction; he would be giving permission for soldiers to be conscripted from his own citizens against his own country. The empty and deceptive distinction between church and court affords no remedy for this disastrous situation. For both are equally subject to the absolute power of the same man, who can urge, or rather command, the members of his church to do whatever he pleases either as a spiritual matter or as a means to a spiritual end, under pain of eternal fire. It is useless for anyone to insist that they are Muslim only in religion and in all the rest faithful servants of a Christian ruler, if they admit that they owe blind obedience to the mufti in Constantinople, who in turn is completely submissive to the Ottoman emperor and formulates and publishes the fatwas of his religion at the emperor's pleasure. Still more obviously would such Turks living among Christians be rejecting a Christian commonwealth, if they recognized the same man as both head of their government and head of their church.

³⁴ The doctrine that dominion is founded in grace, deriving from John Wycliffe (c. 1320–84), was espoused by, among others, extremist groups during the English Civil War, such as the Fifth Monarchy men.

(4) Finally, those who deny that there is a Deity are not to be tolerated at all. Neither the faith of the atheist nor his agreement nor his oath can be firm and sacrosanct. These are the bonds of human society, and all these bonds are completely dissolved, once God or the belief in God is removed. In addition, an atheist cannot claim the privilege of toleration in the name of religion, since his atheism does away with all religion. As for other practical beliefs that may be partly erroneous – provided they do not cover an attempt to acquire domination or civil immunity – there is no reason why the churches which teach them should not be tolerated.

Assemblies

It remains to say a few words about assemblies,³⁵ which are thought to be a great stumbling-block for the doctrine of toleration, since they are commonly suspected to be nurseries of sedition and centres of faction. They may have been so at times, but this was not because of some peculiar trait of their nature, but because of the tragedy that their freedom was either completely suppressed or precariously maintained. These accusations would immediately stop, if a condition of the toleration granted to those who deserve it was that all churches were obliged to teach, as the basis of their own liberty, that those who differ from them on sacred matters must be tolerated, and that no one should ever be coerced on a question of religion by any law or force whatsoever. If this one point could be established, every pretext for quarrels and disturbances in the name of religion would disappear. And if these causes of disorder and bad blood were removed, there is nothing about these assemblies that would make them less peaceable than others and more likely to create political disturbances. But let us go through the main points of accusation against them.

You will say: assemblies and gatherings of people are a danger to the commonwealth and threaten the peace. I reply: if this is so, why is there such a confluence of people every day in the marketplace? Why are there public sessions in the law courts, coteries in private clubs, and big crowds in the cities? You will say: these are civil assemblies, but we are talking

³⁵ Meetings or groups assembled for religious purposes or worship. The Conventicle Act of 1664 – part of the Clarendon Code that sought to impose religious uniformity – prohibited dissenters from holding religious ‘assemblies’ of more than five persons. The Latin word is *coetus*.

about ecclesiastical assemblies. I reply: how strange it would be if the assemblies which are the most remote of all from civil affairs should be the most likely to cause civil disturbances. You will say: civil assemblies are gatherings of people who have different beliefs from each other on matters of religion, but ecclesiastical assemblies are gatherings of people who all share the same belief. I reply: how strange it would be if sharing a belief on divine worship and the salvation of souls amounted to a conspiracy against the commonwealth. And the less freedom people have to meet, the more, not the less, fiercely they support their common belief. You will say: anyone is free to enter civil assemblies, but in the conventicles of co-religionists there is more opportunity for secret and clandestine intrigue. I reply: I deny that all public gatherings are open to everyone (e.g. private clubs, etc.). I also ask, if certain groups *do* hold their sacred gatherings in secret, who is to blame for that? Is it the people who would prefer to hold their meetings in public or those who forbid them? You will say: religious communion binds people's hearts together particularly closely, and is therefore particularly formidable. I reply: if that is the case, why is the ruler not afraid of his own church? Why does he not forbid their assemblies on the ground that they threaten him? You will say: because he is a part of them and their head. I reply: is he not part of the commonwealth itself and head of the whole people?

Let us make the situation clear: a ruler is afraid of other churches, but not of his own, because he favours his own and is kind to them, but he is rigorous and inflexible with the others. The condition of his own people is a condition of free men, and he indulges them to the point of permissiveness. The condition of the others is that of slaves, and the usual reward of their blameless lives is forced labour, prison, loss of rights, and the forcible auction of their property. His own people are indulged; the others are beaten on the slightest pretext. Change their positions, or apply the same law to them in civil matters as to the rest of the citizens, and you will see immediately that there is nothing to fear from religious assemblies. If people contemplate sedition, it is not because they meet for religious purposes, but because they are overwhelmed by misery. Just and moderate governments are everywhere quiet, always secure; unjust and tyrannical governments will always face a backlash from those they oppress. I know that seditions are common, and are very often started in the name of religion. But it is also very often because of religion that subjects are badly treated and suffer discrimination. Believe me, these reactions are not

peculiar to certain churches or religious associations; they are common to all men everywhere who labour under an unfair burden and struggle to throw off the yoke that weighs so heavily upon their necks.

Suppose we forget religion, and imagine discrimination based upon a physical feature. Suppose black-haired or grey-eyed people had a different status from the rest of the citizens. Suppose they were not free to buy and sell, and were forbidden to practise a profession. Suppose that as parents they lost the right to raise and educate their own children. Suppose the courts were either closed to them or the judges unjust. What do you imagine would happen? Surely the ruler would have as much to fear from them as from people whose bond of union is religion, even though they have nothing in common but the colour of their hair or eyes and the persecution that goes with it. A common interest in buying and selling brings some people together to do business, leisure brings others together to enjoy themselves, a common city and a shared neighbourhood unites people in living together, and religion brings yet others together for the purpose of worship. But there is only one thing that unites people in sedition, and that is oppression.

You will say: what are you getting at? Do you want assemblies for religious worship to be held if the ruler forbids them? I reply: why forbid them? The activity is after all both legitimate and necessary. You say, 'but the ruler *does* forbid them'. That is precisely the point of my complaint, that is the source of the problem, that is the fundamental cause of our disastrous situation. Why is a gathering of human beings in a religious building more offensive than a gathering in a theatre or sports stadium? The people there are not more immoral nor more rowdy. In fact it all comes down to this in the end, that these people are badly treated and that is why they must not be tolerated. Take away the unjust legal discrimination, change the laws, and remove the threat of punishment, and all will be safe and secure. Those who dissent from the ruler's religion will feel particularly obliged to preserve the peace of the commonwealth, because they enjoy better conditions there than are commonly found elsewhere. And all the particular and mutually dissenting churches will act as guardians of the public peace by keeping a sharp eye on each other's behaviour, in order to check any tendency towards subversion. They will be keen to prevent any change in the form of government, since they cannot hope for a better situation than they already enjoy, namely, a relation of equality with the rest of the citizens under a just and moderate

government. It is commonly held that the surest support of a civil government is a church which agrees with the prince in religion. And I have shown that this is the only reason why a ruler supports such a church and the laws favour it. But how much safer a commonwealth will be if it enlarges the number of those who support it by extending to all good citizens of *every* church the same courtesy from the prince and the same justice from the law without any discrimination on grounds of religion. Then the only people who will need to fear the severity of the laws will be genuine criminals and disturbers of the public peace.

Conclusion

To bring this at last to a conclusion, we seek the rights that other citizens have been granted. Is worshipping God in the Roman manner permitted? Then permit the Genevan way also. Is speaking Latin allowed in the marketplace? Then allow those who so desire to speak it also in church. At home may we kneel, stand, sit, make various gestures, wear white or black clothes, and wear them short or ankle-length? It should not be wrong to eat bread in church or to drink wine or wash in water. And all the other things that are legally free in ordinary life should remain legally free for any church in its sacred worship. No one's life or health should be ruined for these things, no one's home or property destroyed. The church in your country is entrusted to the administration of presbyters; why should not administration by bishops likewise be allowed for those who prefer it? Ecclesiastical authority is the same everywhere, whether it is exercised by one person or several persons, and it has no competence in civil matters and no power to compel. Nor are wealth or annual revenues any business of the ruling body of a church.

Public acceptance shows that ecclesiastical assemblies and sermons are permitted. You allow them for citizens of one church or sect, why not for all citizens? If a plot is hatched against the public peace in a religious assembly, it has to be stopped in exactly the same way as if it happened at a bazaar. If anything seditious is said or done in a sermon in church, it should be punished in the same way as if the offence had happened in the marketplace. They should not be refuges for agitators and criminals. But a gathering of people in a dissenting chapel is no more illicit than a gathering in a church favoured by the court, and it is no more reprehensible for the one group than for the other. A person should be

liable to suspicion and disrepute only for his own wrongdoing, not for other people's faults. Agitators, murderers, assassins, highwaymen, extortionists, adulterers, lawbreakers, slanderers, and so forth from any church, whether it be the court church or not, should be punished and deterred. But those whose doctrine is peaceful and whose morals are pure and blameless should be treated on the same terms as their fellow citizens. And if gatherings, solemn assemblies, celebration of feast days, sermons, and public worship are permitted at all, they should all be permitted on equal terms to Remonstrants, Antiremonstrants, Lutherans, Anabaptists,³⁶ and Socinians. Moreover if one may frankly say what is true and how it is fitting for human beings to treat each other, neither pagans, Muslims, nor Jews should be refused civil rights because of their religion. The Gospel has no such commandment, the church that 'judges not those that are without' (1 Corinthians 5: 12–13) does not desire it, and the commonwealth does not require it, but accepts and welcomes everyone provided they are honest, peaceful, and hard working. Will you allow a pagan to engage in trade in your country but forbid him to pray or worship God? The Jews are allowed to live among you and have private houses: why are they refused a synagogue? Is their doctrine more false, their worship more offensive, or their loyalty less assured in a public meeting-place than in their private homes?

And if these concessions are to be made to pagans and Jews, is the condition of Christians in a Christian commonwealth to be worse? You will say: yes indeed, because they will be more liable to faction, riot, and civil war. I reply: is there really this evil tendency in the Christian religion? If there is, Christianity is surely the worst of all religions; you should disown it and no commonwealth should tolerate it. For if it is the essential genius of the Christian religion and its natural bent, to be riotous and an enemy of public peace, then even the church favoured by the ruler will eventually turn out to be harmful.

But God forbid that this should be said about a religion that sets itself against avarice, ambition, dissensions, conflicts, and earthly passions, and is the most modest and peace-loving religion there has ever been. We must look for a different cause of the problems for which religion is held responsible. And if we look at it in the right way, it will be obvious that

³⁶ A variety of Protestant sects were known as Anabaptists because of their rejection of infant baptism. For Remonstrants and Antiremonstrants see n. 14, above. For Socinians, see n. 16, above.

the whole cause lies in the issue we are now discussing. It is not diversity of belief (which cannot be avoided) that has caused most of the quarrels and wars that have occurred in the Christian world, but refusal of tolerance to those who have different beliefs, while church leaders, motivated by greed and lust for power, have used every means to excite and inflame against them the frequently boundless ambition of the ruler and the universally fatuous superstition of the people. Contrary to the laws of the Gospel and the precepts of charity, they have always preached that schismatics and heretics should be fleeced and banished, thus mixing up two very different things, the church and the commonwealth. But people do not patiently allow themselves to be robbed of the property they have won by honest labour and, contrary to human and divine law, made victims of violence and theft, especially when they are otherwise completely blameless, over something that has nothing to do with the civil law but is concerned with the individual's own conscience and the salvation of his soul, for which he need render account only to God. This being so, what can really be expected but that people will grow tired of the sufferings to which they are subjected and come at last to the conviction that they may repel force with force, and defend, with whatever weapons they have, the rights which God and nature have given them, rights which may be forfeited only for crimes and not on account of religion?

History has surely given more than enough evidence that this has been the way of things in the past, and reason demonstrates that it will be so in the future, as long as this belief in persecution for religion's sake persists in the minds of the ruler and the people, and those who should be the heralds of peace and harmony sound the call to arms and blow the trumpet for war with all the power of their lungs. It would be hard to credit that rulers would tolerate such instigators of violence and disrupters of the public peace, if it were not notorious that they are offered a cut of the spoils and have often made use of the passion and pride of those agitators to augment their own power. For who does not see that *these good men* have not been ministers of the Gospel but agents of empire, sycophantically serving the ambition of princes and the domination of the powerful, and devoting their energy and passion to promoting in the commonwealth the tyranny that they would otherwise be unable to achieve in the church. This is what the concord between church and commonwealth has usually amounted to, whereas if they had both kept within their own limits, there could at least have been no discord, since one would have been devoted

solely to the worldly interests of the community and the other to the salvation of souls.

But one is ashamed to make these reproaches. May the great and good God cause the Gospel of peace to be preached at last, and may civil rulers be punctilious in conforming their law to God's law, not in binding the consciences of others by human law. As fathers of their country, may they direct all their efforts and intelligence to increasing the civil happiness of all their children who are not violent, unjust to others, and disloyal. And may the clergy, who proclaim themselves the successors of the Apostles, walk in the Apostles' footsteps, and renouncing political ambition, devote all their energies solely to the salvation of souls, in all peace and moderation.

Farewell.

Postscript: heresy and schism³⁷

Perhaps it would not be irrelevant to add a few words here about heresy and schism. A Muslim is not, and cannot be, a heretic or a schismatic in relation to a Christian. And anyone who defects from Christianity to Islam does not thereby become a heretic or schismatic, but an apostate and unbeliever. No one doubts this. Therefore everyone agrees that one cannot be a heretic or schismatic in relation to people of a different religion.

We must therefore ask who it is that belongs to the same religion. The answer to this question is clear: those who have one and the same rule of faith and divine worship are of the same religion, and those who do not have the same rule of faith and worship are of different religions. For since all that belongs to a particular religion is contained in its rule, it follows that those who agree on the same rule, agree also on the same religion, and vice versa. Thus Turks and Christians are of different religions, because Christians acknowledge Holy Scripture and Turks acknowledge the Koran as the rule of their religion. By manifestly the same reasoning, there may be different religions under the name of Christian. Though both Papists and Lutherans are plainly Christians in that they profess faith in the name of Christ, they are not of the same religion. For the

³⁷ Popple heads this section of his translation *Postscriptum*. The 1689 Gouda text does not give it a separate title.

latter recognize Holy Scripture alone as the rule and foundation of their religion, while the former supplement Holy Scripture with tradition and the decrees of the pope in fashioning the rule of their religion. The so-called Christians of St John³⁸ and Genevan Christians are of different religions, though both are called Christians, because the latter have the Holy Scripture as the rule of their religion while the former have a variety of traditions. On these premises, it follows:

- (1) That a heresy is a separation made within an ecclesiastical communion among people belonging to the same religion, on account of doctrines which are not contained in the actual rule.
- (2) That among those who recognize Holy Scripture alone as the rule of faith, a heresy is a separation made within a Christian communion on account of doctrines not contained in the express words of Holy Scripture.

This separation may be made in two ways:

- (i) When the larger part of a church, or the part which is stronger because of the ruler's patronage, separates itself from the rest by ejecting and excluding them from the communion because they refuse to profess that they believe certain doctrines which are not contained in the words of Scripture. For neither the minority status of those who are separated nor the authority of the ruler can make someone guilty of heresy. The heretic is simply the one who splits the church into parts because of such doctrines, and introduces names and notes to mark the distinctions and willingly causes a separation.
- (ii) When someone separates himself from a church communion, because it does not make public profession of certain doctrines that Holy Scripture does not enunciate in explicit language.

Both of these persons are heretics. For they are in error on fundamental points, and deliberately and knowingly persist in error. Though they have taken Holy Scripture as the sole foundation of faith, they nevertheless accept another foundation, namely propositions found nowhere in Holy Scripture. And when others refuse to recognize these idiosyncratic and adventitious beliefs, which they have tacked on to Holy Scripture, as

³⁸ So named from St John the Baptist, they are also known as Mandaeans or Nasoreans, and a small community still survives in Iraq and Iran.

necessary and fundamental beliefs, and refuse to rely upon them, they either expel them or themselves withdraw, thus bringing about a secession. It is irrelevant to say that their confessions and articles of faith are consistent with Holy Scripture and the analogy of faith. For if they are formulated in the words of Holy Scripture, there can be no question about them, because these and all similar words are by universal consent fundamental, being inspired by God. But if you say that the articles which you require people to profess are *inferences* from Holy Scripture, you are right to believe and profess those which seem to you to be consistent with the rule of faith, which is Holy Scripture, but you are very wrong if you try to impose them on others to whom they do *not* seem to be indubitable doctrines of Holy Scripture. And you are a heretic if you cause a separation because of them, since they are not, and cannot be, fundamental. For I do not think that anyone is mad enough to dare to advertise his own inferences and interpretations of Holy Scripture as inspirations of God, and to endow articles of faith which he has fashioned to his own mind and measure with the authority of Holy Scripture.

I know that there are propositions which are so obviously consistent with Holy Scripture that no one can doubt that they follow from it, and there can be no quarrel about these. But you must not impose on others as a necessary article of faith anything that seems to you to follow by valid deduction from Holy Scripture, because you yourself believe it to be consistent with the rule of faith – unless you are willing to accept that other people's views be imposed by equal right upon you, and you be compelled to accept and profess different and mutually conflicting doctrines from Lutherans, Calvinists, Remonstrants, Anabaptists, and other sects, doctrines which the manufacturers of creeds and systems and confessions are apt to impose upon their followers and preach as necessary and genuine inferences from Holy Scripture. I cannot help but wonder at the unholy arrogance of those who think that they can teach what is necessary to salvation more clearly and plainly than the Holy Spirit, who is the infinite and eternal wisdom.

So much on heresy, a word which in common usage is applied only to doctrines. We must now look at schism, which is a fault related to heresy. To me both words seem to signify a separation rashly made within an ecclesiastical communion on inessential questions. But the prevailing usage applies 'heresy' to errors in faith and 'schism' to errors in the form of worship or discipline; and since usage is 'the arbiter, the authority and

the norm of speech'.³⁹ this is the distinction which we will have to use for our own discussion.

Schism then, for the reasons given above, is simply a separation in the communion of a church brought about over some inessential point of divine worship or church discipline. Nothing in divine worship and church discipline is essential to a Christian for communion except what is commanded by Christ the law-giver in explicit language or by the Apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I will put it in a word: a person who does not deny anything that the divine pronouncements⁴⁰ declare in explicit language and does not cause a separation over anything which is not overtly contained in the sacred text, cannot be a heretic or a schismatic, however much he may be slandered by any of the sects that go under the Christian name, and however much any or all of them may declare him to be destitute of true Christian religion.

These points might have been argued more fully and completely, but for a person of your sagacity these remarks will suffice.

³⁹ Locke is quoting from Horace, *The Art of Poetry* 71–2: *usus / quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi.*

⁴⁰ Holy Scripture.